

Improve funding for Florida's educational needs

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Re the April 1 article, *Florida Senate moves to temporarily suspend school grades*:

As the Florida Legislature gears up for the final 30 days of its session, it is important to keep in mind the priorities that are still left standing in regards to Miami-Dade County Public Schools. As the nation's fourth largest school district, serving about 345,000 students, it is in a position to make a huge difference in propelling improvements to education.

It is encouraging to note that strides are being made to reduce and regulate the amount of testing our students engage in throughout the school year. In fact, if passed, SB 616 will meet the M-DCPS recommendations regarding accountability for our public schools. However, not enough mention has been given to the status of funding for our student's educational needs.

Our students desperately need an increase in the Base Student Allocation and total per student funding, and in turn an opposition to unfunded state mandates. Our schools also need equitable capital funding — construction and maintenance programs. In short, this funding would allow M-DCPS to keep educational programs, teacher salaries, and even the M-DCPS' bond rating from being negatively impacted.

It is also necessary to improve the current accountability standards. In order for these new standards to progress smoothly, the schools, the district, and human capital decisions need a two-year transitional period, until more data on the Florida Standards Assessments becomes available and is both a valid and reliable form of measurement. Additionally, it is advisable to eliminate the 11th grade FSA assessment and the required end of course exams. These recommendations are in line with the current bill being discussed and hopefully reaching a compromise that will work in favor of all.

Lastly, much has been discussed concerning certain changes towards the Value Adjustments Board proceedings. M-DCPS needs to have a better opportunity to make use of its full funding — schools have been penalized due to late completion of property valuation. For more swift proceedings to take place, it is recommended that the VAB limit the number re-scheduled appeals to only one, with good cause. Also, it would be important for the VAB to complete all appeals by June 30. Doing so would likely reduce issues concerning the use of full funding by schools.

As a volunteer chairman of the Citizens' Oversight Committee, I join my colleagues in strongly requesting consideration of the aforementioned revisions. Our ultimate goal as volunteers for the M-DCPS is to improve the conditions as a whole, and we believe that addressing these concerns will prove useful and beneficial for our student's educational experience and environment.

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